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ABSTRACT

To attempt to assert that assessing educational need is a concept new to education would be naive. On the other hand, there is little question that this most critical component of planning and decision-making has over the years largely been left to the somewhat capricious whims of intuition and educational "guessmanship." This paper is a report on one effort to place need assessment on a more substantive and responsible basis. The study concentrated on producing five different but complementary types of information: (1) a description of the status of learners in seven broad behavioral areas, (2) a statement of critical needs in these areas, (3) a description of the population characteristics most highly correlated with each identified need, (4) an evaluation of the effect which certain selected system inputs have on each need, and (5) an analysis of the opinions which certain "educationally-relevant" subpopulations hold regarding education. Three strategies are utilized to this end: (1) a secondary analysis of state and district socioeconomic, ethnic and educational data, (2) a survey of the educational practices and learner characteristics of Florida school districts, and (3) a sampling of the opinions of selected subpopulations. While the study is not seen as the final word in assessment models, it is felt to be a significant step in the right direction. The appendices include a list of eight behavioral areas in which needs were identified, eleven need-susceptible target populations with critical needs identified, and details of the effectiveness of system inputs. (Author/CK)

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A REPORT ON THE FLORIDA EDUCATIONAL NEEDS STUDY, 1968-1970[a]

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In 1968, the responsibility for administering Title III, ESEA, at the state level was transferred from the United States Office of Education to the individual state departments of education. As part of this change in administrative locus, each state was expected to assess the critical educational needs unique to its own population and to use this information as the basis for distributing "new" monies made available under the program.

Florida was most receptive to the idea of a statewide assessment and it hardly bears reaffirmation here that, when this requirement became known, singular importance was attached to the prospect of carrying out such a program within the state. Consequently, a position was immediately taken by the Florida Department of Education that whatever the strategies ultimately chosen for assessment, they must not only be based upon the most current educational thinking in the area but, at the same time, incorporate the thinking of the wide variety of formal educational interests represented in the state. Along with this, it was also felt that the Department should assume as much of the direct responsibility for planning and implementing the actual processes of assessment as its resources would permit.

However, a realistic appraisal of the time constraints imposed upon the assessment activity plus an evaluation of these already overburdened resources

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indicated that a project of this magnitude could not be implemented entirely in the spirit desired without some outside help. For this reason, early in the summer of 1968, those members of the Department who were charged with overseeing the state's assessment effort, called upon the Florida Educational Research and Development Council (FERDC) for assistance. The FERDC was asked to assemble and subsequently supervise a special study design task force, having the necessary qualifications of background and experience to develop a plan that was generally consistent with the aforementioned position regarding strategies and which, at the same time and within reason, maximized the Department's role.

In response to this request, nineteen experienced, professional educators, many of whom were widely known in the fields of educational theory and research, were brought together by the FERDC from public and private schools, public and private universities, the U. S. Office of Education and the Florida Department of Education. Meeting in two separate sessions of several days each, the group outlined a comprehensive multi-strategy study, entitled Plan for Study of the Educational Needs of Florida. The plan was adopted in June of 1968 by the State Board of Education. A few months later, it was initiated by the Department and from that point on acted as the sole guide for Florida's assessment effort.

Objectives and Methods

The various research strategies included in the plan by the FERDC task force were primarily designed to provide the state with five somewhat different types of information. These were: first, a description of the status

of Florida learners in seven broad areas of behavior which were seen as pertinent to the state's educational interests; second, a statement of the critical educational needs of Florida learners in terms of these objectives; third, a description of the population characteristics most highly correlated with the incidence of each critical need; fourth, an evaluation of the effect which certain selected system inputs have on each critical need; and finally, an analysis of the attitudes and opinions which certain "educationally-relevant" subpopulations in the state hold regarding education. All five types of information taken together, were seen by the task force as necessary to place the Department on firm ground in future efforts to deal with identified needs.

The seven broad areas of behavior identified by the task force for the purpose of establishing learner status, corresponded very closely to the Seven Cardinal Principles authored by the N.E.A. in 1918. Altogether, these seven status areas included the following: (1)communication and learning skills, (2) citizenship, (3) vocational interests, (4) mental and physical health, (5) home and family relationships, (6) cultural and aesthetic appreciations, and (7) moral and ethical values.

Data Collection Strategies

Three different data collection strategies were also included in the plan to supply the necessary data input for this information. These were: (1) a review and secondary analysis of state and district socio-economic, ethnic and educational data already accessible to the Department from a wide variety of public and private agencies; (2) an original survey of the educational practices and learner characteristics of a random sample of

Florida schools; and (3) an original sampling of the opinions of certain specified subpopulations within the state. Seven such subpopulations were identified as being of particular interest in this latter activity: adult residents of the state, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members and employers of former school students.

The first two strategies were designed to be implemented by the Department. The opinion survey, on the other hand, was seen as beyond the scope of the Department's facilities and a recommendation was made that it be contracted to "an independent and qualified firm . . . experienced in conducting such activities." Accordingly, after the plan was adopted, the opinion survey was turned over to the Survey Data Center of Florida State University where it was carried out under the direction of Dr. Norman Luttbeg, a member of the University's Political Research Institute.

Shortly after Florida's assessment program had gotten underway, an administrative decision was made in the Department to temporarily replace the survey of school practices above with a more limited one of "district practices." Although space does not permit a discussion of what was considered in this decision, it should be noted that the substitute activity was organized primarily around the use of existing data, thus, negating the necessity of a field survey. Also, great care was taken to insure that, even though a different level of analysis would be involved, the new activity would serve essentially the same analytical purposes as those of the original survey. In one sense of the word, the substitute survey was also seen as a "pilot activity" which, if properly carried out, could provide invaluable input to planning the much more complex and extensive school practices survey that was still being considered for implementation at a later date.

To give direction to each of the data collection activities, three sets of 60 to 70 similarly worded questions about the "learner" and his environment were formulated by the task force. They were distributed across the seven broad "status areas" referred to earlier, and, as a consequence, ranged over an extremely wide variety of topics - demographic, social, and economic, as well as educational, with perhaps the greatest emphasis on the first three areas. Comparatively speaking, very few questions actually focused on school achievement per se. In formulating questions with this emphasis, the members of the task force were making a special attempt to insure that Florida's assessment would be particularly sensitive to the non-academic needs of learners. Too often, it was felt, this kind of need tends to be overlooked by the system in its concern for the more strictly academic problems of students. In deference to the problems seen as inherent acquiring and analyzing the data for this initial effort, the task force delimited the scope of Florida's first assessment effort to the needs of public school students, K-12, which, operationally, covered an age group of approximately 5 through 18 years. As would be expected, not every question formulated by the task force was capable of being answered. Thus, while the overall effort did meet with better than average success, it was necessary on several occasions to make data substitutions. Including these, approximately 80 percent of the questions were answered in all.

Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to bring up two problems which arose during the study because of the heavy reliance that was placed on the use of existing or secondary data.

The first of these problems centered around the fact that only very rarely do public and private agencies collect data which pertain to the subject of

"aesthetic and cultural appreciations" and when they do, the "data" are seldom amenable to use in research. As a consequence, this particular status area could not be properly investigated as to the existence of learner needs.

The second problem was created when it became necessary during the study to rely upon information that was somewhat out-of-date for assessment purposes. This situation was particularly notable in those analyses involving such important variables as socio-economic and racial characteristics which were usually available only through 1960 Census reports. Fortunately however, more recent estimates or counts were acquired for a few of the variables being used. Correlations were then run between the two dates and, in these cases, the coefficients that obtained were generally quite high, most frequently well above .90. As a result, some evidence was in the offering that, at least for these variables, very little, if any, improvement would have been gained had more recent data been available.

Data Analysis Strategies

General guidelines for analyzing the data once they had been collected were also included in the assessment plan by the task force. These guidelines dealt primarily with the identification of needs and with making determinations as to their criticality. For carrying out these activities, the task force recommended that a special data evaluation panel be convened along with four criteria which the panel could use to judge the criticality of needs once they were identified. While general formats were also provided for handling the other areas of analysis, by and large, they were left to the discretion of the panel. It should also be noted that the task force did not feel the data collected from the opinion survey should enter directly into the identification of

learner needs other than in a supplementary manner. Actually, these data were viewed more as input to future planning activities than as sources of information about needs.

When the evaluation panel was organized toward the end of the study, only minor changes were made in the overall procedures. A substitution was made, however, for one of the suggested criteria which the panel felt could be improved upon. Thus, in final analysis, a need was considered critical according to the following criteria:

(1) The differential between goal and status was too large to be attributable to chance

(2) The amelioration of the need was seen as vital to the achievement of any one of the Department's long-range objectives (goals)

(3) The need was found to be persistent (of long duration)

(4) The need was selective, i.e., it was found to be more highly associated with certain segments of the learner population than others.

The initial identification of a need was generally based upon the evidence of an observed difference between the distribution of a certain desired learner characteristic in the state's population (or in some subpopulation within the state) and a "norm." This norm usually took the form of a comparable national, state, or subpopulation value seen as applicable by the panel.

Two types of data entered into the panel's specification of need-susceptible target populations: first, observed excessive differentials between status and goal for specific subpopulations and second, the results of a special correlation analysis carried out in conjunction with the survey of district practices.

The method of evaluating the effectiveness of district practices was

based upon a partial correlation analysis. Here the panel decided whether or not a meaningful amount of variance in learner performance could still be attributed to system inputs after the effect of non-educational factors had been partialed out.

Results

Based upon the procedures just described, the panel identified critical needs in the eight behavioral areas described in Appendix A. These needs were found to be distributed across six of the seven status areas which were originally established by the FERDC task force. The failure to identify critical needs associated with "aesthetic and cultural appreciations", as will be recalled, was the function of a lack of data and, therefore, is not to be construed as the absence of real needs in this status area. Steps are currently being taken in the Department to rectify this particular problem in future assessment activities.

A total of eleven need-susceptible target populations were also identified. These ran the gamut of population characteristics considered in the study. However, only two such populations were found to be associated with all eight behavioral areas while five target populations were found to be associated with only one area each (see Appendix B).

Finally, based upon their review of the data, the panel concluded that when certain non-educational factors, such as socio-economic and racial context are considered, "quality" system inputs such as those investigated in the study have only minimal, if any, substantive effect on the resolution of the critical needs which had been identified (see Appendix C).

Comment

There is little question that a great deal was learned from Florida's first, full scale, formal assessment. Not only was this true concerning the educational needs of the Florida population but, equally so, with respect to the "do's and don'ts" of an assessment, and particularly the "don'ts." Throughout the assessment, those of us who had direct responsibility for the study were unceasingly amazed by the superabundance of data that were already being collected to describe various aspects of Florida's population. At the same time, however, we were also constantly disappointed in our inability to use a great deal of the information that these data sought to provide, either because of the form in which they were reported or because of certain reservations held about the manner or conditions under which they had been collected. This was no less the case with some of the data collected by our own Department. Perhaps, one of the most valuable "spin-offs" from the activity, and a direct outgrowth of this frustration, was the recognition by the Department of the need for a viable, uniform data base for the continuous assessment of learner needs which stimulated the development of the "Florida Needs Assessment Information and Statistical Support System." This information system, including data base and statistical routines, is expected to play a vital role in the future assessment and, as well, evaluation activities of the state.

The future of statewide assessment in Florida is assured by legislative statute,and, hopefully, much of our experience in the Title III effort will find utility in the planning of the state supported program which is now in this early stage. As for the Title III assessment, the wealth of data that was collected is still being reviewed and analyzed. A formal publication on

the activity will soon be forthcoming. Plans are also currently being made to review the entire activity in preparation for at least a partial replication of the study using the new 1970 census data that will shortly be available.

Appendix A

Florida's Critical Educational Needs[b]

Although the following eight statements are called "needs," they are intended only to describe broad classes of learner weakness identified during Florida's assessment. To obtain more definitive information on specific learner weaknesses (needs) within each area, it would be necessary to return to the original document produced as a result of the assessment study.

There is a critical need for Florida learners---

1. to acquire the basic language and quantitative skills and knowledge which will enable them to deal competently with the usual kinds of intellectual and learning tasks expected of them both in and out of school.

2. to realize the functional importance of the preparatory skills and knowledge which can be gained through the formal educational process and to develop the kinds of attitudes that will, in turn, lead to their continued participation in school at least through the twelfth grade or its equivalent.

3. to acquire, prior to entering the first grade, the experiential background which will enable them to successfully participate in the formal educational process.

4. to develop the appropriate attitudes and citizenship skills which will lead them to more fully understand and to actively assume the role of responsible membership in a democratic society.

5. to develop the appropriate attitudes and requisite vocational skills which will enable them to successfully respond to current and anticipated demands of local, state, and national job markets.

6. to acquire the attitudes and health habits essential to the maintenance of good mental and physical health.

Appendix A - Continued

7. to acquire the interpersonal and social skills and attitudes which are essential to establishing and maintaining stable, responsible family relationships.

8. to develop the kinds of social attitudes and values that will lead to the adoption of behaviors acceptable to the moral and legal codes of contemporary society.

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[b]The numerical organization used with Florida's critical needs is not intended to reflect an ordering of priorities and any one need could have been placed in any k position.

Appendix B

Target Populations[c]

Population	Critical Need
1. Non-white	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
2. White	8
3. Rural	1,2,3,5,6
4. Urban	7
5. Low economic and occupational status	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
6. Native population	1,3,4
7. Overage students	1
8. Students in small schools	1
9. Teenage population	5
10. Males	6,8
11. Females	7,8

[c]The numerical organization of target populations is not intended to imply priority concern.

Appendix C

Effectiveness of System Inputs

I. Input Variables

1. Percent of the district's schools designated as fully accredited by the Department of Education in 1968 (DOE)

2. Percent of the district's expenses devoted to instruction, i.e., staff salaries, textbooks, audio visual equipment, etc., 1967 (DOE)

3. Percent of major high school classes in the district taught by teachers-in-field, 1967 (DOE)

4. Percent of major high school classes taught by teachers, in-field, 1968 (DOE)

5. Percent of Instructional Personnel in the district holding a Rank II, or higher certificate, (Masters Degree or above), 1968 (DOE)

6. Percent of Instructional Personnel below Rank III (Bachelors Degree) 1968 (DOE)

7. Average number of pupils per teacher, based on average daily membership, grades 1-12, 1968 (DOE)

II. Context Variables

1. Percent of county population who were non-white in 1960 (Census)

2. Percent of county population classified as urban in 1960 (Census)

3. Percent of employed persons in the county in white collar occupations, 1960 (Census)

4. Median family income for the county, 1960 (Census)

5. Percent of the families in the county with an annual income of less than $3,000, 1960 (Census)

6. Percent of native population born in Florida, 1960 (Census)

7. Median school years completed by persons 25 years old or over in the county, 1960 (Census)

8. Percent of families with annual income of $10,000 and over, 1960 (Census)